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The John Birch Society

More and more attention is being fixed on the John Birch Society. It is manifestly an organization of very conservative men. Its leader is Robert H. W. Welch, Jr., a former candy manufacturer who lives in and operates the society out of Belmont, Mass.

There are only a few reports on the organization, named after an American missionary to China who, at a relatively young age, joined Gen. Claire Chennault and was killed, Welch believes, by the Communists some 10 days after VJ Day.

The origin of the society has been traced, according to reports, to an Indianapolis meeting of 12 men in 1958. Except for Welch, the others have never been identified. But at the meeting, Welch moved to have himself named John Birch head, and succeeded.

The fundamental conservatism of the society, which claims members in many states—one John Bircher saying that there are members in all states—is evident certainly in the multiplicity of publications it puts out. One of these is

The Birmingham News Editorials

Victor H. Hanson, Publisher, 1910-1945

Clarence B. Hanson, Jr., Publisher

James H. Couey, Jr.

Vice President and General Manager

Vincent Townsend, Editor

E. L. Holland, Jr.

Editorial Page Editor

Sunday, April 2, 1961

American Opinion, a magazine published 11 times a year and edited by Welch.

Welch himself may go farther in some of his condemnations than do all the society's members. The Birch chief has called several persons in government either an out and out Red or a Communist dupe. Naturally the entire Supreme Court has come under his fire, but so have such as former President Eisenhower, former Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, Allen Dulles, head of our Central Intelligence Agency, and so on.

Welch apparently looked with some favor on Nixon, but Nixon has criticized the John Birch Society. Welch apparently considers Barry Goldwater a good conservative, but he doesn't put much stock in him, it seems, because of a conclusion that Goldwater thinks in political terms. The assumption would seem to have to be that politics cannot be allowed to impinge upon principles.

This is only a smattering about the society, which operates in an extensive fashion, apparently with sizable financial backing.

But the organization is certainly bound to attract more and more attention. Its basic conservatism is something which may attract many Americans fearful, most of all, lest we slip into the Communist trap; certainly reasonable conservatives can endorse a view which warns of excessive centralization of government.

But critics of John Birch say it damages the good cause of conservatism because it is too radically on the right. Certainly its conclusions, or those of

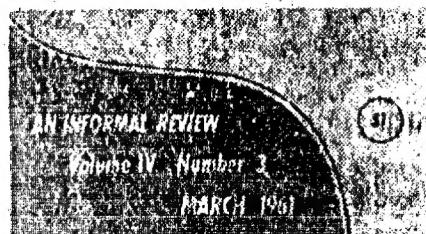
But Welch has attracted some very prominent persons to support of his efforts. For example, on his advisory editorial committee for American Opinion there are John U. Barr, Charles Edison, Clarence Manion, Ludwig von Mises, Gen. Albert C. Wedemeyer, J. Bracken Lee and Spruille Braden, to name only a handful.

Most of these persons have conservative views, as a matter of record over many years, and have seemed quite sincere in their efforts, even though others may have disagreed with them over one or more matters.

The question seems to be shaking down, whether the John Birch Society is something of conservative value, or whether it goes too far. There is a kind of mysticism to the organization and various questions about it are left unanswered. More information about it is certain to come to the fore as it continues a very vigorous drive in behalf of conservatism. But obviously if it went too far, kept too radically to the right, then its own cause could be damaged. Americans tend to grow wary over extremes in either direction.



ROSALIE M. GORDON



Welch's Magazine Cover